

Choosing A Career

You're going to be working for 30 or 40 years, so your occupation should be something that gives you satisfaction AND a decent paycheck. It's up to you to make it happen.

Time and planning are the keys to a successful career. The time you take to really plan your career will pay off for the rest of your working life. Here's some advice on getting started:



Do a detailed and comprehensive self-assessment. Just like you want a shoe that fits if you plan to walk for a long time, you want a career doing something you enjoy. And just like your foot isn't necessarily the same size as someone else's, what they enjoy doing may not be something you will enjoy, year after year.

Although money is always a major consideration for a career choice, it's far from being the only reason for taking a job. Similarly, going into a given field to live up to someone else's expectations of you is unwise. Remember, your work is part of your total life, and you are the captain of that ship. To find and get the rewards of a successful and satisfying career, you must accept the responsibility of getting to know yourself fully, researching your options, and making choices all along the way that will help you reach your life goals.

Clarify your values. Your basic beliefs and values need to be reflected in the career you choose. You cannot be happy doing something day in and day out that forces you to violate your own values.

Prioritize your needs. What do you want your job to offer you? List those things in order of their importance to you. Understand that in order to have one thing, you may need to sacrifice another.

Assess your skills. Look at the skills you have, including interpersonal skills, language skills and your work ethic. If they are lacking, figure out how to build them.

Identify your work interests and your hobbies. These may help in the type of job you'd like. Also keep in mind that some hobbies should stay hobbies.

Separate "career" from "money" in your mind and plans. There may be times when you need to take the first job you can get just to pay the bills. But taking a job just for the money can be a big mistake in trying to build a career. When you take the time to plan, you will be able to spot jobs that will get you where you want to go. In the long run, you want to be making good money in your preferred field. That might take months or even years, so don't get discouraged.

Realize that most successful people have worked long and hard for their rewards.



Great careers are built on planning and spotting opportunities that come your way. Luck may be a small factor at times, but good planning and steady hard work on building a career are the sure bet to get where you want to go. The person that seems to have it made may have gotten there by working 10+ hours a day, or relocating often or when it wasn't very convenient. They may have paid their dues in a number of ways that you aren't aware of. They probably were adept at recognizing an opportunity when it arose, and willing to sacrifice short-term gratification for the long-term goals they set for themselves.

Be willing to make the effort—and don't get discouraged.

- Spend *time* planning your career, and expect to keep doing it on a continuous basis.
- Be thorough and focused, but flexible. Don't plan so rigidly that you aren't open to interesting options you hadn't considered previously.
- Do one career-building task every week, such as: building your professional network, increasing your skills, talking to others about potential opportunities, learning more about your industry. Your weekly career-builder may also be something you need to do for your job. For example, you're given the assignment to give a presentation on your team's progress toward its yearly goals. Use this opportunity to learn a new software program to create a slide show. You'll be able to excel at the assigned task while adding another software skill to your resume.
- Ask people in your preferred career about how they got where they are. From their stories, you can learn things you need to do and how to position yourself to achieve your own goals.
- If you can afford it, taking a position in the industry of your career choice that will help you develop a valuable skill set is better than an taking unrelated job that pays well.
- Look for paid opportunities to learn transferable skills. Training offered by the company, tuition reimbursements, and other opportunities can serve you even after you've left your current job.

Ultimately, you want a balance between your lifestyle and your career plans. When evaluating yourself, make sure you've included everything that might be useful in your choice. If you take this advice and follow these steps, you'll end up with a variety of careers to choose from that may be right for you. It's important to look at all the possibilities before making your decision.



Most of All...

Take responsibility for your own career. You need to shape it, not let it shape you. Decide what you want your career to be and make your opportunities match. True, sometimes you have to take a role assigned by employers. But you can also make roles for yourself that will help you further your career. Look for projects to take on that will help you get from where you are to where you want to be. Be prepared to put in extra time and effort now for a payoff later.